

Psychological Challenges and Social Supports That Shape the Pursuit of Socioeconomic Mobility



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Many people seek higher status through socioeconomic mobility. Higher education institutions and professional workplaces include barriers to entry and inclusion that make it difficult for people from lower socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds to reach their goals. Experiences within these settings can lead people to feel status uncertainty, which is an aversive ambiguity about where one stands on the socioeconomic hierarchy. Status uncertainty has negative consequences for achievement and well-being, but social support may play a role and buffer against these negative consequences. First, a longitudinal study of college students shows predicted connections between socioeconomic background, status uncertainty, social support, and grades at the end of the college years. Next, an experiment shows that inducing a stronger sense of social support protects against negative workplace outcomes for those from lower SES backgrounds. Together, the studies demonstrate the significance of supportive forces during the pursuit of socioeconomic mobility.

Keywords: socioeconomic status, academic achievement, well-being, social support

One of the most common ways that people seek higher status is following a path of socioeconomic mobility characterized by academic achievement and success in the workplace (Ma, Pender, and Welch 2016). Approximately half of working adults born in the 1980s indeed earn household incomes that exceed the household incomes of their childhood years (Chetty et al.

2017). These trajectories often result from the expanded labor-market opportunities that accompany a degree from a reputable four-year college or university. It is well documented, however, that the likelihood of successfully navigating such opportunities to attain educational and occupational status depends on many factors unrelated to individual merit or

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ability (see McNamee and Miller 2009). One inherent challenge associated with upward socioeconomic mobility is a type of uncertainty that can occur when ascending a status hierarchy. As people begin to reach success in school and work, they are likely to experience a sense of *status uncertainty* or destabilizing difficulty in understanding and articulating their own socioeconomic status (SES; Destin, Rheinschmidt-Same, and Richeson 2017).

THE EXPERIENCE OF SOCIOECONOMIC MOBILITY

Helping people complete more education, obtain higher-status jobs, earn more income, and achieve financial stability are common objectives of a variety of social policies. A trove of correlational studies supports these efforts and demonstrates the lifetime rewards of having higher SES. For instance, higher SES is associated with better health, a greater sense of control, and higher levels of happiness (see, for example, Cohen et al. 2010; Kraus, Piff, and Keltner 2009; Diener et al. 2010). At the same time, however, both higher- and lower-SES contexts confer protective factors that promote positive outcomes and risk factors that can lead to negative outcomes (Spencer, Dupree, and Hartmann 1997; Spencer et al. 2015). In other words, not all aspects of having higher SES are experienced in positive or even demonstratively better ways than aspects of having lower SES. This perspective is relevant in understanding the experiences, trajectories, and outcomes of people who are moving from a lower to a higher SES position.

Higher education provides an especially suitable context to examine experiences of upward socioeconomic mobility. As young people from lower SES backgrounds transition into and out of college, they move toward establishing their own SES that may be distinct from that of their origins. Sociological studies provide in-depth examples of some of the positive experiences in addition to some of the unique challenges that lower SES students face in college environments. These include, for example, covering the everyday financial costs of attending college with limited economic resources and support (see, for example, Goldrick-Rab 2016). They also often include navigating a

complex and expensive peer social scene dominated by higher SES norms and values (see, for example, Armstrong and Hamilton 2013).

Multiple theoretical perspectives in psychology have also provided insight on the challenges that lower SES students systematically face as they experience socioeconomic mobility in higher education. One area of work draws specific attention to the social and cultural resources from their home communities that students often lose as they transition to colleges and universities (see, for example, Herrmann and Varnum 2018). This social and physical separation from family, friends, and communities often necessary to pursue higher status can create a psychological conflict known as achievement guilt (Covarrubias and Fryberg 2015).

Another related area of work in psychology describes the specific ways that lower and higher SES contexts tend to differ in regard to their cultural norms and values. Specifically, higher SES environments are more likely to promote a sense of independence, separation, and competition while lower SES environments are more likely to encourage interdependence, connection, and cooperation (Stephens, Markus, and Phillips 2014). As higher SES environments, most four-year colleges and universities espouse values and practices that are aligned with the experience of students from higher SES backgrounds. For example, administrators, college leaders, and faculty often emphasize the importance of independent values such as competition over interdependent values such as community responsibility. As a result, college students from lower SES backgrounds must often navigate an unfamiliar set of cultural norms and expectations on college campuses and in college classrooms. Several experiments have demonstrated how this cultural mismatch can impair the ability of lower SES students to succeed in college environments (Stephens et al. 2012). Further, even professional workplaces can continue to advantage the experience of employees from higher SES backgrounds through similar processes (Dittmann 2020).

STATUS UNCERTAINTY

One way that all of these social, psychological, and academic challenges that can accompany

socioeconomic mobility are actually experienced and understood by young people is through shifts in their identities. More specifically, people strive to have a clear understanding of who they are and where they stand in society, which can be described as their status-based identities. Such identities are made up of a combination of the narratives that people hold about their SES, the SES groups that they feel connected to, and the ways they imagine their SES in the future. Status-based identity is thus dynamic and shifts according to time and social context. People who experience major shifts in their status-based identity, perhaps due to rising the socioeconomic ladder, become likely to feel heightened status uncertainty.

The concept of status uncertainty connects multiple traditions of theory and research related to the psychological study of the self with the study of SES and socioeconomic mobility. It captures how the experience of socioeconomic mobility disrupts a person's understanding of relevant aspects of who they are. For example, the narrative component of one person's status-based identity might include their history of growing up with a single parent in a working-class community. Throughout their school years, perhaps they found a high level of inspiration and support, eventually leading to their enrollment at a major university and trajectory toward a successful professional career. The social component of their status-based identity could begin to feel complicated as they came to experience economic mobility and create new connections. They might feel difficulty fully relating to the experience of their college and workplace peers from more economically privileged backgrounds. At the same time, they could also have an increasingly different life experience from the members of their family of origin. For instance, this divergence could become poignant when contrasting lifestyles, such as being able to afford more expensive housing or considering a widening range of possible travel or vacation plans that remain inaccessible to important family and community members. Finally, the future component of their status-based identity could include concerns about professional advancement, pressure to make a family of their own,

and anxiety about the possibility of owning a home. Overall, it is likely that a person on this particular life trajectory would feel considerable status uncertainty and ambiguity about how to describe their SES given the various shifting status positions associated with their dynamic identities. Finding a significantly different economic position during adulthood than in childhood, feeling somewhat connected to multiple status groups, and having an unclear idea of future social and economic prospects all contribute to status uncertainty and its array of psychological consequences.

Facing status uncertainty can be associated with a range of challenging and undesirable outcomes. In general, people strive to achieve a degree of coherence and clarity in understanding who they are and how other people evaluate them and their various identities (Campbell et al. 1996). It is psychologically gratifying for individuals to feel that they know themselves well and psychologically distressing for individuals to feel unsure about themselves and their identities. For many individuals from lower SES backgrounds, achieving success in school and the workplace can create distance from the people and communities of their origin. At the same time, they may not feel securely settled in new, higher-status contexts.

Existing studies suggest that this specific form of uncertainty leads people to encounter greater challenges in navigating opportunities and continuing to successfully pursue valued goals (Castillo-Lavergne and Destin 2019; Destin, Rheinschmidt-Same, and Richeson 2019; 2017; Destin and Debrosse 2017). For example, a survey of approximately 150 college students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds showed that the experience of status uncertainty can be measured reliably. Further, students from lower SES backgrounds, for whom college is likely to promote status mobility, report higher feelings of status uncertainty than those from higher SES backgrounds, and these feelings are associated with lower psychological well-being during college (Destin, Rheinschmidt-Same, and Richeson 2017). A subsequent longitudinal study shows a pathway whereby increased uncertainty about SES leads to a weakened sense of academic efficacy,

which leads to lower grades during college (Destin, Rheinschmidt-Same, and Richeson 2019).

However, evidence also suggests that feelings of uncertainty about SES during status transitions are malleable and can be shifted based on the social context and experiences. In an experiment including approximately two hundred college students, an experimental treatment successfully led participants to momentarily experience either high or low status uncertainty. Participants randomly assigned to experience low status uncertainty were subsequently more motivated to engage in important school behaviors, including seeking support from peers and faculty, than participants assigned to experience high status uncertainty (Destin, Rheinschmidt-Same, and Richeson 2019). Because a brief cognitive exercise can momentarily shift feelings of status uncertainty, it is likely that various types of more consistent support may influence the experience of people pursuing socioeconomic mobility.

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL SUPPORT

Social support is one of the most consistent and reliable predictors of health and well-being (see Cohen and Willis 1985; Taylor 2011). Decades of evidence demonstrate that the more people feel they can count on close others in their everyday lives and in times of need, the better they feel about their lives (see Feeney and Collins 2015). Support itself has been shown to benefit a range of lifetime outcomes related to health and achievement, and a sense of social connectedness can be especially important for people from lower SES backgrounds (see Chen, Brody, and Miller 2017). At the same time, however, the paradox of social support is that those who most need it often encounter the greatest barriers in obtaining consistent support from others. When people face a variety of social and psychological challenges like unemployment or depression, they become less likely to reach out for support. Further, people sometimes avoid contact or providing support to others who face such negative circumstances (Debrosse 2021). These general patterns related to social support may be relevant to understanding the experience of people facing status un-

certainty as they pursue socioeconomic mobility.

As young people navigate the social hierarchy, they may benefit from feeling connected to a range of important people in their lives as well as to specialized programs and initiatives that build community and support. However, because feelings of status uncertainty are negative, aversive, and ambiguous, they may lead people to feel isolated and unable to connect with important sources of social support. Examining these supports or their absence may be essential in understanding when and how status uncertainty instigated by the experience of socioeconomic mobility leads to negative academic and workplace outcomes.

In related research, when young people are experimentally guided to cultivate support on the path to their goals, they find more importance and meaning in the challenging everyday tasks that they encounter (Destin, Debrosse, and Silverman 2021). This type of meaning making can facilitate both well-being and continued persistence. Thus lack of support may help to explain how status uncertainty translates to impaired achievement and well-being. At the same time, finding and maintaining support amidst socioeconomic mobility may bolster positive outcomes despite facing status uncertainty. For example, a college student from a lower SES background who begins to grapple with uncertainty about their place in society may be particularly uncertain about where to reach for support and how to articulate everyday challenges. Subsequently, the lack of support is likely to have negative consequences for a range of important outcomes related to their achievement and health. However, finding and maintaining various forms of interpersonal and institutional support may mitigate the negative effects of status uncertainty and the challenges of socioeconomic mobility on the student's goal-pursuit and well-being.

CURRENT STUDIES

In two studies, we analyze the experience of young people navigating the social hierarchy and working toward socioeconomic mobility in college and the workplace with various levels of social support (see figure 1). First, a college

longitudinal study examines the possible role that experiences of social support may play in a hypothesized pathway explaining the experiences and outcomes of college students. The study follows a cohort of approximately 150 college students from the first term of their first year of college to the final quarter of their fourth year. The study evaluates the proposed path linking a lower SES family background to greater status uncertainty during college. The study further tests whether more status uncertainty is associated with finding lower levels of support later during college, and in turn negative potential consequences for both academic achievement and well-being.

Turning to the next developmental phase, the second study is a workplace experiment to test the potential roles that status uncertainty and social support may play in shaping occupational experiences and outcomes after college. The experiment includes a sample of approximately two hundred recent college graduates who have entered the workforce. The design evaluates whether coming from a lower-income background, experiencing uncertainty about SES, and experiencing social support are each independently associated with psychological experiences in the workplace (that is, organizational fit, comfort, commitment, and job

satisfaction) among recent college graduates. Further, an experimental manipulation tests whether feeling a stronger sense of social support affects the workplace experience and directly or indirectly protects against intentions to leave an occupation.

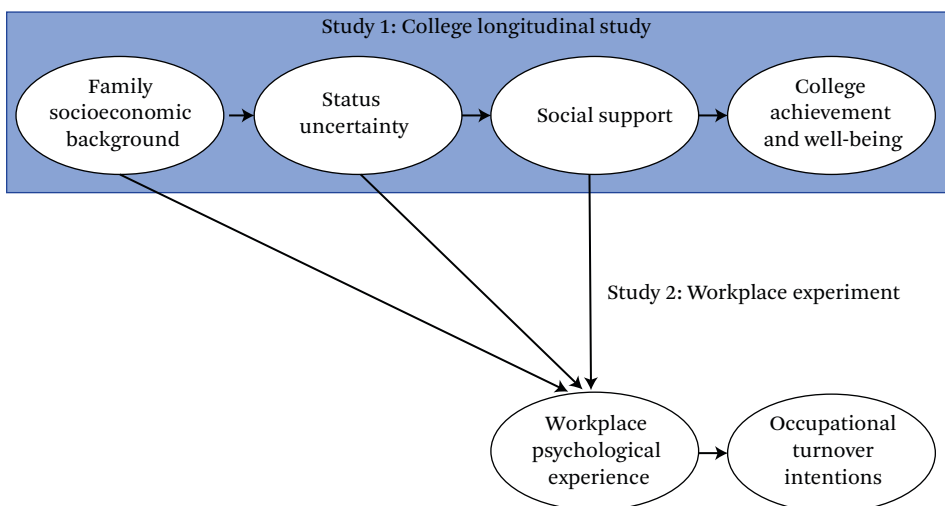
COLLEGE LONGITUDINAL STUDY

We conducted a longitudinal study of college students in order to evaluate how the financial resources in their family of origin are associated with their developing understanding of their own evolving socioeconomic status. We also aimed to determine whether connections between students' levels of certainty or uncertainty about their SES and the social support and connections they maintain were significant, having implications for achievement and well-being.

Method

We recruited 153 college students during the first semester of their first year of college at a selective four-year institution in the Midwest. Participants completed an online survey once each year for four years that included several measures related to their socioeconomic identity, behaviors, well-being, and achievement. They also provided permission for us to access

Figure 1. Model of Pathways Tested in College Longitudinal Study and Workplace Experiment



Source: Authors' conceptualization.

their grade point averages (GPA) from administrative records each year. For this report, we focus on measures related to the hypothesized relationships.

Measures

Family income. During the first term of their first year (T1), participants completed a measure of their annual family income on a scale from 1 = \$25,000 or less to 9 = \$300,000 or more ($M = 5.01$, \$90,000 to \$120,000, $SD = 2.59$). Family income is theorized as the aspect of SES especially indicative of socioeconomic mobility among students of traditional college age in ways that are connected to status uncertainty.

Status uncertainty. During their second year (T2), participants completed an eleven-item measure of the degree of certainty or uncertainty they felt about their own SES, from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree; sample item, "My beliefs about where I stand in society often conflict with one another"; $M = 3.72$, $SD = 1.05$, $\alpha = .91$ (Destin, Rheinschmidt-Same, and Richeson 2017).

Social support and connection. During their fourth year (T3), participants completed an eleven-item measure of the level of the availability of various sources of social support and connection in their lives, from 1 = none to 5 = all of the time; sample item, "Someone you can count on to listen to you when you need to talk"; $M = 4.18$, $SD = .75$, $\alpha = .93$ (Sherbourne and Stewart 1991).

Achievement. Finally, the cumulative GPAs of participants were collected at the end of their fourth year of college ($M = 3.59$, $SD = .29$).

Well-being. During their fourth year, participants also completed a five-item measure of life satisfaction to evaluate their general well-being, from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree; sample item, "I am satisfied with my life"; $M = 4.89$, $SD = 1.16$, $\alpha = .81$ (Diener et al. 1985).

Self-concept clarity. Participants completed a measure of self-concept clarity at T2, which captures general uncertainty about the self on a scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree; sample item, "In general, I have a clear sense of who I am and what I am"; $M = 4.12$, $SD = 1.07$, $\alpha = .88$ (Campbell et al. 1996). Self-

concept clarity was included as a covariate in all paths that included status uncertainty in order to distinguish the role of uncertainty about SES from uncertainty about the self in general.

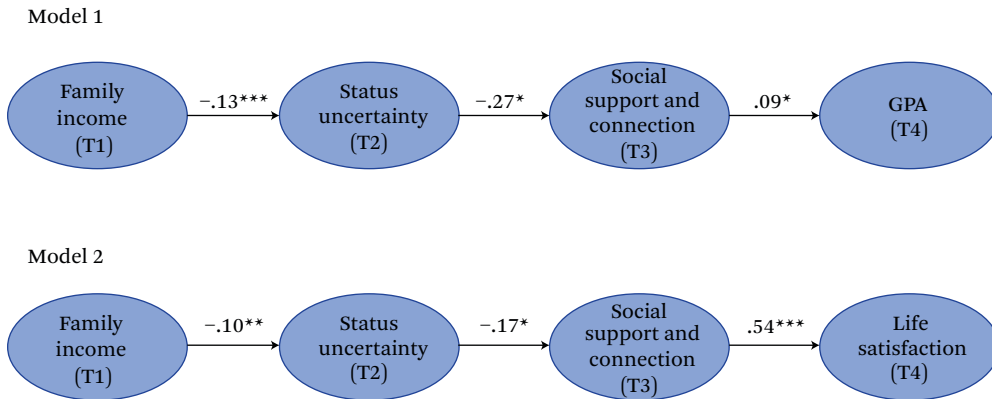
Results and Discussion

We conducted structural equation modeling to test two longitudinal path models evaluating proposed processes resulting in students' academic achievement and well-being. Model 1 evaluated the connections from students' family household incomes as they began college to their feelings of status uncertainty during their second year. Next, it evaluated whether status uncertainty in their second year was associated with subsequent experiences of social support and connection measured during their fourth year. Finally, the path tested the link from support and connection to students' cumulative academic achievement at the end of their fourth year of college. Model 2 tested the same paths except that the final path evaluated the implications for students' general well-being.

As shown in figure 2, all individual paths were significant for model 1, starting with family income through status uncertainty, social support, and connection, and ending with students' GPA at the end of their fourth year. Model index showed a strong overall model fit ($CFI = 1.00$), however the direct and indirect effects from family household income to achievement were not significant ($ps > .157$).

Model 2 showed similar results. All individual paths, starting with family income through status uncertainty, social support and connection, and ending in students' life satisfaction at the end of their fourth year were significant. The model index showed an adequate overall model fit ($CFI = .94$). The direct effect from family household income to life satisfaction was significant ($\beta = .14$, $p = .001$), however the overall indirect effect was not significant ($p = .128$).

The college longitudinal study analyses demonstrate evidence for connections from a student's socioeconomic background through their experiences in college to achievement and well-being. The relationships between individual variables all aligned with expectations, but evidence was mixed regarding the overall direct and indirect relationships from family socio-

Figure 2. Results of College Longitudinal Study

Source: Authors' tabulation.

Note: All solid paths are statistically significant, and values represent standardized coefficients.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

economic background to outcomes at the end of college. Together, these patterns suggest that though the observed relationships between key factors may shape the experiences of many students, they do not indicate a deterministic route to negative outcomes for all students from lower SES backgrounds. Given the generally high achievement of students at selective institutions, traditional indicators of achievement like GPA may not be as vulnerable or important as the indicators more relevant to well-being and health such as status uncertainty, social disconnection, and life satisfaction. Indeed, the direct relationship from family SES to life satisfaction at the end of college was significant and in need of further study. A more nuanced measurement of well-being is likely to provide a more complete picture of the processes leading from socioeconomic background through status uncertainty to such outcomes.

Given that processes related to support were related to variables in predicted patterns but did not contribute to significant indirect effects, deeper investigation of how support functions during socioeconomic mobility remains necessary. We next therefore examine the role of support more directly through a controlled experiment with young people from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds progressing through the transition from college to work.

WORKPLACE EXPERIMENT

We conducted an experiment to investigate how the process of socioeconomic mobility continues to unfold for young people as they enter the workplace. The study aims to evaluate whether uncertainty about socioeconomic background becomes associated with negative occupational outcomes in this next developmental period. The study also directly manipulates feelings of social support and connection to determine whether experiencing more support might protect against some of the challenges that those navigating socioeconomic mobility encounter in the workplace.

Method

We recruited 199 participants who had graduated from a four-year college within the past two years to participate in an online experiment via Qualtrics Panels (mean age 22.90, $SD = 2.20$). We used quotas to recruit participants from a full range of childhood family income backgrounds. Once recruited, participants were randomly assigned to either a *high support* or a *low support* condition (adapted from Destin, Rheinschmidt-Same, and Richeson 2019). In the high support condition, participants were momentarily led to feel a strong sense of social support and connection by reflecting upon a time when they “had a lot of support that you needed from close family or friends.” In the low

support condition, on the other hand, participants were momentarily led to feel a weak sense of social support and connection by reflecting upon a time when they “did not have the support that you needed from close family or friends.”

Measures

Childhood family income. Participants indicated the level of annual income in their family household when they were growing up on a 9-item scale from 1 = \$25,000 or less to 9 = \$300,000 or more ($M = 4.16$, $SD = 2.15$). This measure captures the aspect of participants’ socioeconomic background most relevant to socioeconomic mobility in the current model.

Status uncertainty. Participants completed the same 11-item measure of the degree of certainty or uncertainty that they feel about their own SES as described in study 1 ($M = 4.01$, $SD = 1.20$, $\alpha = .88$).

Organizational fit. Participants responded to a 4-item measure indicating their sense of fit with their work organization; sample item, “I feel like I fit in with my current organization”; 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree, $M = 4.88$, $SD = 1.36$, $\alpha = .87$ (adapted from Walton and Cohen 2007; Stephens et al. 2012).

Comfort in organization. Participants completed a 3-item measure of their level of comfort in their work organization; sample item, “I feel comfortable working in this organization”; 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree, $M = 4.96$, $SD = 1.25$, $\alpha = .64$ (Dittmann 2020).

Workplace capital. Participants completed a measure of the amount of social and cultural capital that they felt at the workplace; sample item, 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree, “I understand what it takes to be successful at work”; $M = 5.30$, $SD = 1.10$, $\alpha = .73$ (Dittmann 2020).

Organizational commitment. Participants responded to a 6-item measure of their commitment to their work organization; “I really care about the fate of this organization”; 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree, $M = 4.68$, $SD = 1.13$, $\alpha = .72$ (Porter et al. 1974).

Job satisfaction. Participants completed a 5-item measure indicating their general level of satisfaction with their job; sample item, “I feel

fairly satisfied with my present job”; 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree, $M = 4.71$, $SD = 1.23$, $\alpha = .78$ (Judge, Bono, and Locke 2000; Brayfield and Rothe 1951).

Turnover intentions. Participants completed a 4-item measure capturing their thoughts about leaving their work organization; sample item, “To what extent have you thought seriously about changing organizations since beginning to work here?”; 1 = not at all, 7 = a great deal, $M = 3.79$, $SD = 1.53$, $\alpha = .74$ (O’Reilly, Chatman, and Caldwell 1991).

Social support. Finally, participants completed a 19-item measure of how often different kinds of support are available (Sherbourne and Stewart 1991; sample item, “Someone you can count on to listen to you when you need to talk; 1 = never, 5 = all the time, $M = 3.87$, $SD = .84$, $\alpha = .96$).

Results and Discussion

Given the limited research regarding the transition of young people from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds into the workplace, we first observed basic correlations between childhood family income, status uncertainty, and work-related outcomes. As shown in table 1, childhood family income was not directly associated with status uncertainty or any workplace outcomes. However, greater feelings of status uncertainty were associated with several negative work outcomes among recent college graduates, including less organizational fit, less comfort in the organization, weaker feelings of job commitment, and weaker feelings of job satisfaction. More status uncertainty was also associated with less social support.

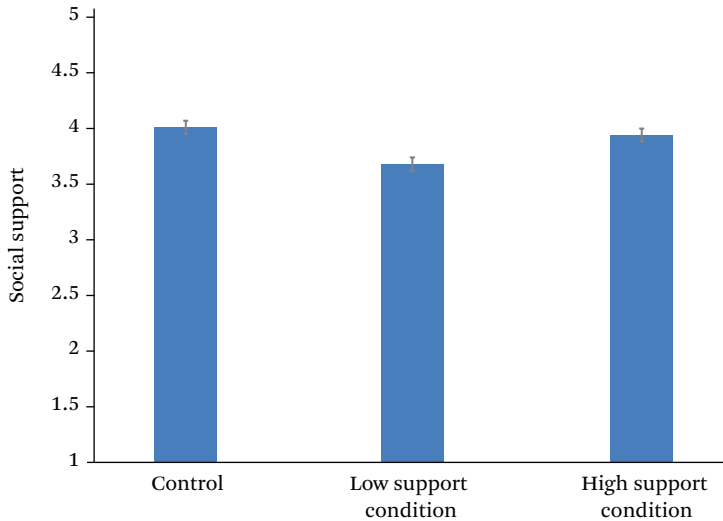
Next, we evaluated effects of the experimental social support treatment, using linear regression with orthogonal contrasts. The manipulation did not have any direct effects on young people’s feelings of status uncertainty or workplace outcomes ($ps > .218$). The experimental manipulation did, however, have a direct effect on participants’ feelings of social support (see figure 3). Participants who were randomly assigned to the low support condition subsequently expressed lower feelings of support than participants randomly assigned to the control and high support conditions, $b = .09$, $SE = .04$, $t = 2.38$, $p = .018$. The control

Table 1. Correlations for Study Variables

	Childhood Family Income	Status Uncertainty	Fit	Comfort	Capital	Commitment	Satisfaction	Turnover	Support
Childhood family income									
Status uncertainty	.02								
Fit	.04	-.15*							
Comfort	.09	-.26***	.65***						
Capital	.06	-.03	.50***	.49***					
Commitment	-.02	-.26***	.56***	.66***	.45***				
Satisfaction	.03	-.24***	.54***	.69***	.49***	.80***			
Turnover	-.01	.10	-.38***	-.46***	-.32***	-.68***	-.68***		
Support	.07	-.12†	.23**	.28***	.30***	.18*	.27***	-.09	

Source: Authors' tabulation.

† $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Figure 3. Effects of Workplace Experiment on Feelings of Social Support

Source: Authors' tabulations.

and high support conditions did not differ from one another, $b = -.04$, $SE = .07$, $t = -.49$, $p = .623$. Results were unchanged when including status uncertainty as a covariate in the analysis.¹

Because of the observed effect of the experimental manipulation on support and the observed correlations between support and other workplace outcomes, we then developed a structural equation model to evaluate the potential indirect effect on workplace experiences and outcomes. Specifically, we evaluated whether the experimental treatment led to increased support, which would then be associated with a latent construct capturing psychological experiences in the workplace (fit, comfort, capital, commitment, and satisfaction), which would finally be associated with turnover intentions. As shown in figure 4, the predicted pathways and overall indirect effect were significant (indirect effect $\beta = -.03$, $p = .049$). The direct effect was not significant ($p = .410$), the overall model fit was strong ($CFI = .974$), and all paths were unchanged when including status uncertainty as a covariate in the model.

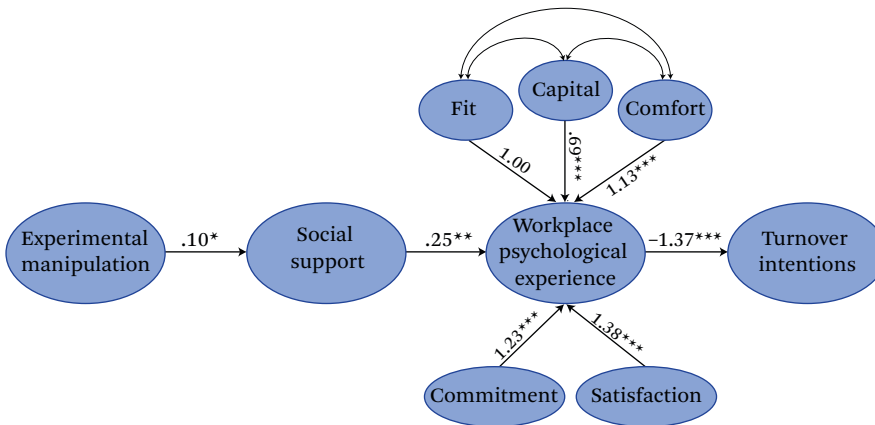
Overall, study 2 first demonstrated that feel-

ing greater status uncertainty is associated with a more negative transition to the workplace along several dimensions. Surprisingly, this experience was not directly related to socioeconomic background or affected by support. In other words, regardless of background, young people may experience vulnerability connected to uncertainty about their SES as they leave college and join the workforce. The experimental component of the study, however, demonstrated that people do benefit from feelings of support, with a series of indirect positive consequences for their experiences in the workplace and intentions to persist in their occupations. The role of support in this pathway mattered independent of the relationship between status uncertainty and workplace experiences.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

As people follow the commonly desired path from attending college to graduating and beyond into starting their first jobs, they navigate a wide variety of opportunities and challenges. For those from lower SES backgrounds, it is common to experience a shift in economic standing and a corresponding unexpected

1. Results were also unchanged in an exploratory analysis including a measure of participants' current income as a covariate.

Figure 4. Indirect Effects of Experimental Manipulation on Workplace Experiences and Outcomes

Source: Authors' tabulations.

Note. All solid paths are statistically significant, and values represent standardized coefficients. Model includes covariances between error terms of latent variable constructs fit, capital, and comfort.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

sense of uncertainty about identity. A longitudinal study found evidence that as lower SES college students encounter status uncertainty, they feel a subsequent lack of support and show lower achievement and well-being toward the end of their college years. Next, an experiment showed how feeling uncertain about SES is also related to worse adjustment and integration into the workplace. However, when new workers felt greater connection and support, there is a corresponding cascade of associated positive outcomes. Ensuring that people can remain connected to important relationships and have access to new sources of support as they transition into the workplace appears to be essential for a healthy and successful trajectory of socioeconomic mobility.

The findings highlight the importance of understanding people's subjective experiences of negotiating shifts in their sense of self as they move from one socioeconomic context and standing to another. These shifts certainly occur within higher education and workplace contexts but might also be relevant to a variety of other interpersonal situations and physical relocations throughout life that accompany a change in SES. Decades of research demonstrate the importance of social support in promoting health and well-being, and the current

studies reaffirm and extend the role of social support and connection as key to navigating status transitions. Additional research remains necessary to better understand how specific sources of support function in people's lives during socioeconomic mobility. In addition to maintaining relationships and building new connections, a better understanding of how institutions can effectively provide support also remains essential.

As colleges, universities, and workplaces aim to increase the diversity of backgrounds represented among their students and employees, the findings suggest that they should also restructure themselves to acknowledge and meet people's needs. In higher education, this can include attention to multiple layers of students' sociocultural context including financial resources, institutional messaging and programming, faculty development and teaching practices, and even efforts to shape the peer student culture (Destin, Rosario, and Vosoughi 2021). Similarly, workplaces that continuously attend to, evaluate, and take action to support the well-being of their employees from diverse backgrounds are more likely to witness their success and retention. Colleges, universities, and workplaces vary tremendously, however, and support should be tailored to the

specific people, characteristics, resources, opportunities, and challenges within those environments.

Despite the key findings, this research has certain limitations. First, the conceptualization and measurement of well-being was markedly broad in order to capture a wide range of experiences. Future research might focus on more specific aspects of well-being tailored to particular contexts to better capture the experiences of people navigating them. Relatedly, the experiment used a broad manipulation of support designed to allow people to bring to mind personally relevant sources of connection in their lives. Future research could test the effects of more specific types of interpersonal or institutional support and perhaps actually provide support rather than only invoke it in people's minds. Also, additional research is necessary to better understand potential direct connections between a person's socioeconomic background and their workplace experience that were expected but not observed in the current study. It is possible, however, that graduation from college decreases status uncertainty among those from lower SES backgrounds or that people from a wider range of backgrounds begin to question their status as they move into new and unfamiliar workplace settings.

Last, the studies exclusively investigate the role of participants' socioeconomic backgrounds and identities. Intersecting experiences of other sociodemographic dimensions of identity are almost certain to simultaneously shape people's shifting conceptualizations of their own status (Valentino 2022, this issue). For example, the nature of interactions across racial and ethnic groups and the gender dynamics of interpersonal relationships systematically shape status-related processes (Lareau 2022, this issue; Manago, Sell, and Goar 2022, this issue). These considerations all highlight how the current approach and findings provide a foundation and encouragement for continued work with added layers of complexity and specificity.

Together, the two studies contribute new depth to the understanding of how young people from lower SES backgrounds understand their place on the socioeconomic hierarchy as they pursue their goals. The studies also dem-

onstrate the significance of important supportive forces in their lives to counteract the prevailing negative influence of oppressive hierarchies on their achievement and well-being. These findings suggest that institutions can help to improve the outcomes and experience of their students and employees by offering new opportunities for interpersonal connection and a variety of social supports. In addition, institutions can play a role in actively facilitating opportunities for young people to maintain valued connections to the people and communities that might otherwise become increasingly distant over time.

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